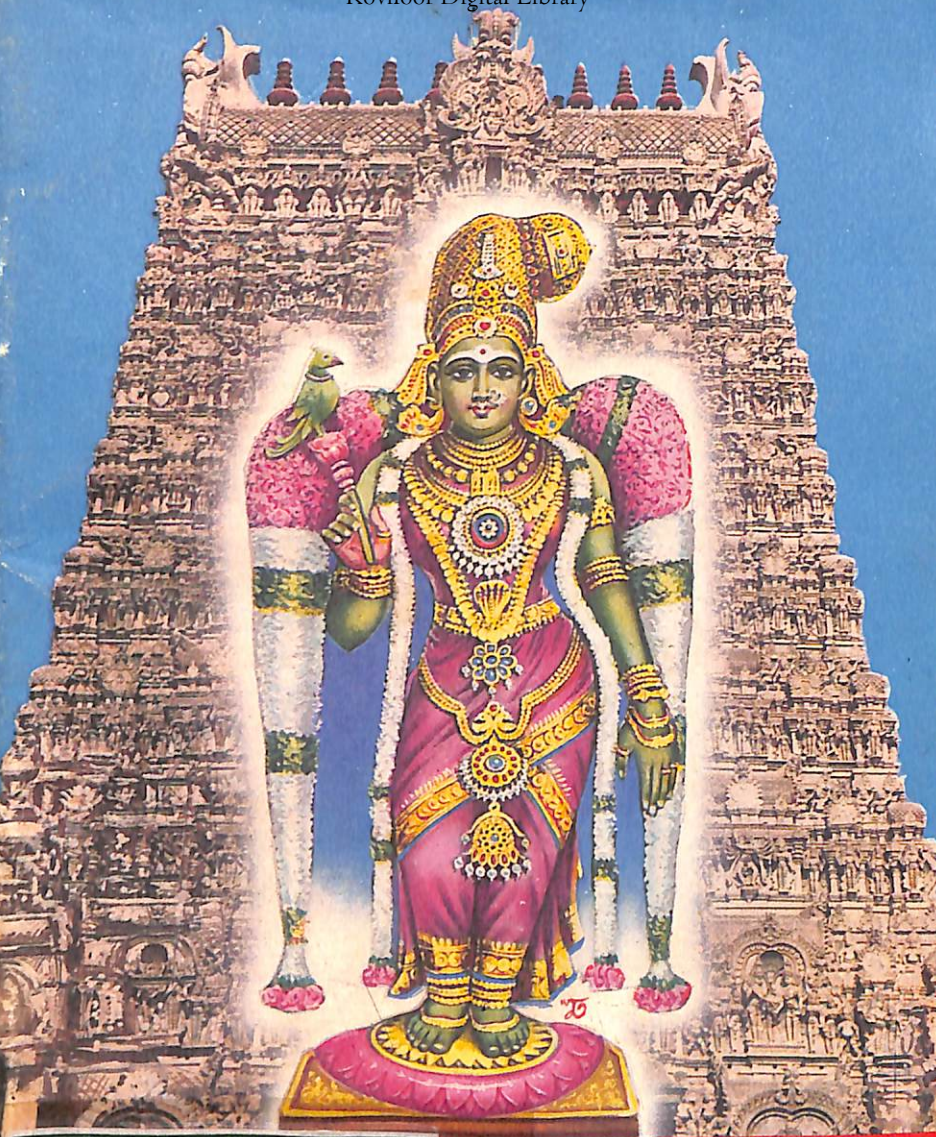




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MADURAI



GOLDEN LOTUS TANK

MADURAI



By

V. MEENA

796



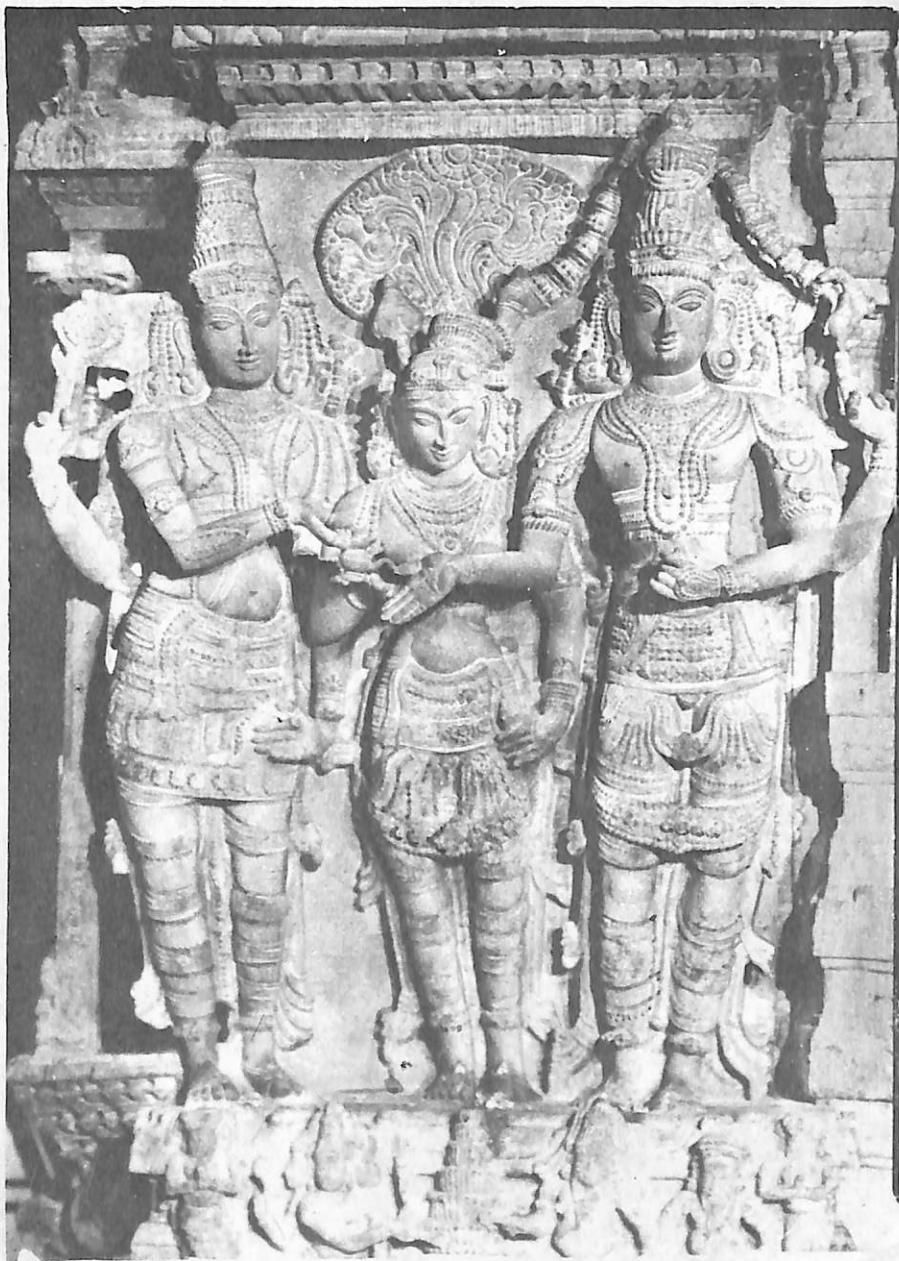
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MEENAKSHI'S WEDDING (MADURAI)

MADURAI

Madurai, the ancient home of Tamil culture is the seat of the famous temple dedicated to Meenakshi and Sundareswarar. A charming city enriched by the waters of the sacred Vaigai, it is the greatest attraction for every tourist who visits the South.

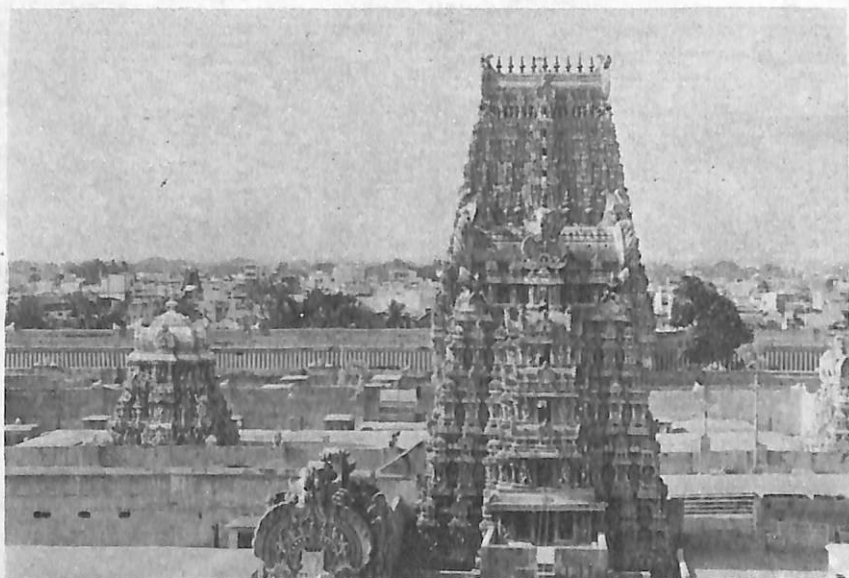
Madurai City



Glowing tributes have been paid to this city by bards and poets. Here Goddess Sakthi incarnated herself as a mortal, reigned as the Pandyan Princess and wedded Lord Siva who performed 64 miracles to render succour to His devotees.

The sight of the majestic towers, a cluster of small and large ones, amidst the verdure of the smiling landscape, arrests the attention of the visitor even from a distance.

West Tower and the golden dome



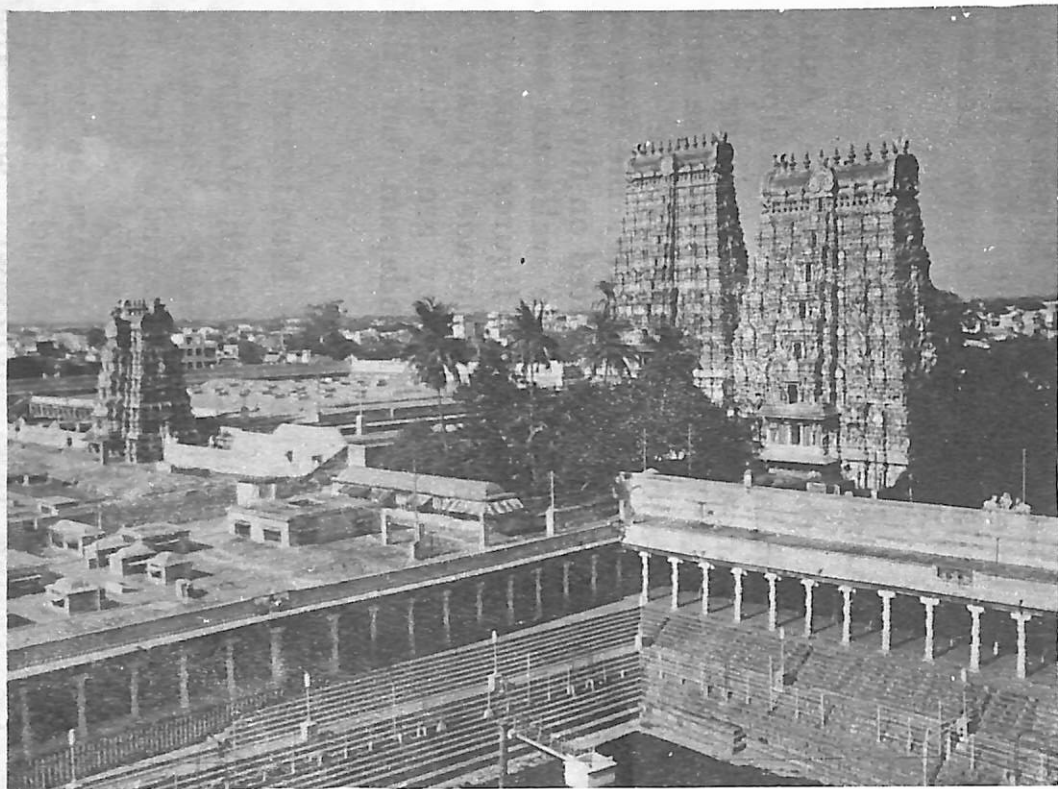
As it is customary to worship first Devi Meenakshi and then Lord Sundareswarar people enter the temple through the Ashta Sakthi Mandapam on the eastern street.

Ashta Sakthi Mandapam

Over the entrance to the Ashta Sakthi Mandapam is found the sculptural representation of the wedding of Meenakshi. The images of Ganesa and Subramanya are seen on either side. The Mandapam is so called after the figures of eight Sakthis represented on the pillars on the two sides. On the walls are seen paintings and sculptured figures depicting scenes from the Thiruvilayadal Puranam. The figures of the four great Saivite saints adorn the Mandapam on the eastern end.

Meenakshi Naicken Mandapam

Crossing the Ashta Sakthi Mandapam we come to the extensive Meenakshi Naicken Mandapam, named after its builder. It has five aisles separated by six rows of stone pillars on which are carved yalis and other figures. Connecting this Mandapam with the Ashta Sakthi Mandapam is a hall where



the idols of Siva and Parvathi in their manifestation as a hunter and huntress never fail to evoke our admiration. At the western end of this Mandapam is the massive Thiruvatchi containing 1008 brass oil lamps.

Mudali Pillai Mandapam

A splendid Chitra Gopuram invites us to the Mudali Pillai Mandapam, also known as Dark Mandapam. Of the numerous carvings here, the figures of Bikshadanar, of the infatuated wives of the rishis of Tharugavana and of Mohini, are the most outstanding, and each one has a tale to tell. The images of Muruga and Vinayaka and that of Kadanthai Mudaliar who built this Mandapam are also admirable monolithic pieces of art.

Golden Lotus Tank

We pass from the Dark Mandapam to the beautiful sacred Potramarai kulam (Golden Lotus Tank). According to tradition, Indra bathed in this tank in order to purify himself of his sin and worshipped Lord Siva with golden lotus flowers picked from this tank. The tank is surrounded by spacious corridors. On the pillars of the northern corridor are

figures of 24 poets of the Third Tamil Sangam. Figures of Dananjayan, the merchant who discovered the main shrine in the forest Kadambavanam, and of Kulasekara Pandyan who built the temple and the city, are also seen on two pillars in this corridor. On the walls of the northern and eastern corridors are numerous paintings depicting scenes from Thiruvilayadal Puranam. From the eastern corridor we can see the golden domes over the sanctum sanctorum of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar. The verses of Thirukkural are inscribed on marble slabs embedded in the wall of the southern corridor.

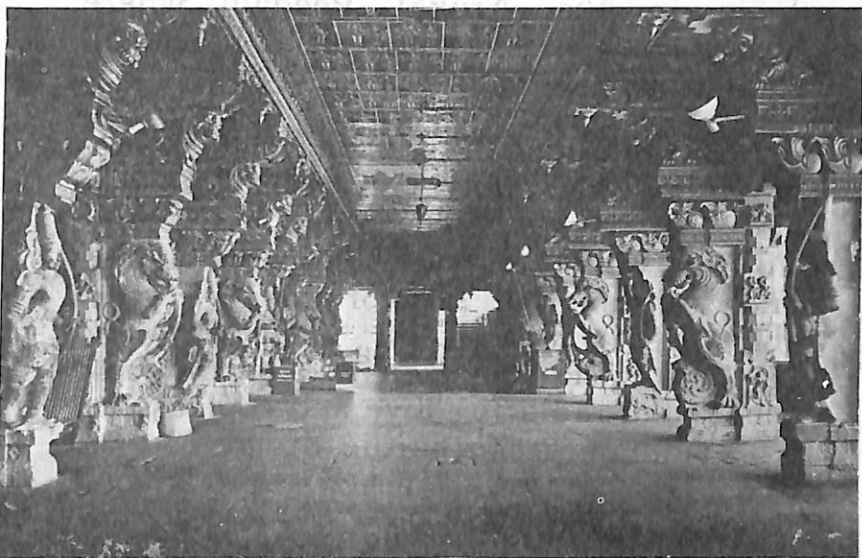
Unjal Mandapam

Adjacent to the tank, on the western side is the Unjal Mandapam. In the marble platform the gold images of Sundareswarar and Meenakshi are placed on Fridays for worship. The ceiling of the Unjal Mandapam is richly painted with pictures of Lord Muruga's six famous temples (Arupadai veedu). Projecting into the tank, on the western side, is a balcony where the figures of Queen Mangamma and her minister Ramappayyan can be seen.

Kilikoottu Mandapam

Adjacent to the Unjal Mandapam is the Kilikoottu Mandapam so called after the parrots kept in cages here. The long row of pillars and the delicately carved figures impart a grandeur to the hall. The sculptures of the Pancha Pandavas, Vali, Sugriva and Drowpathi are marvellously chiselled. Opposite to the shrine of Devi the two large paintings, one of the coronation and the other of the wedding of Meenakshi enhance the beauty of the hall. The mural paintings of the Gods on the ceiling fill us with wonder and admiration.

Kilikoottu Mandapam



Meenakshi Shrine

Crossing the Kilikoottu Mandapam, we enter the shrine of Devi Meenakshi. A three storeyed Gopuram stands at the entrance. In the outer prakaram, the golden flag staff, Thirumalai Nayakkar Mandapam, brass images of Dwarpalakas, shrines of Vinayaka and Koodal Kumarar are seen. Thriupugazh stanzas sung by Arunagirinathar are inscribed on the walls of the Koodal Kumarar shrine.

The Maha Mandapam or the inner prakaram can be reached through the doors in the Arukal Peedam where Kumaraguruparar sang his Meenakshi Ammai Pillai-Tamil.

In the Maha Mandapam, the shrines of Ayravatha Vinayakar, Muthukumarar and the celestial bedroom can be seen. To the west are the Artha Mandapam and the sanctum sanctorum. We worship Devi Meenakshi, the fish-eyed Goddess, who stands with a parrot and a bouquet, radiating love and compassion. The sublime grace of the divine Mother and Her infinite mercy are beyond words.

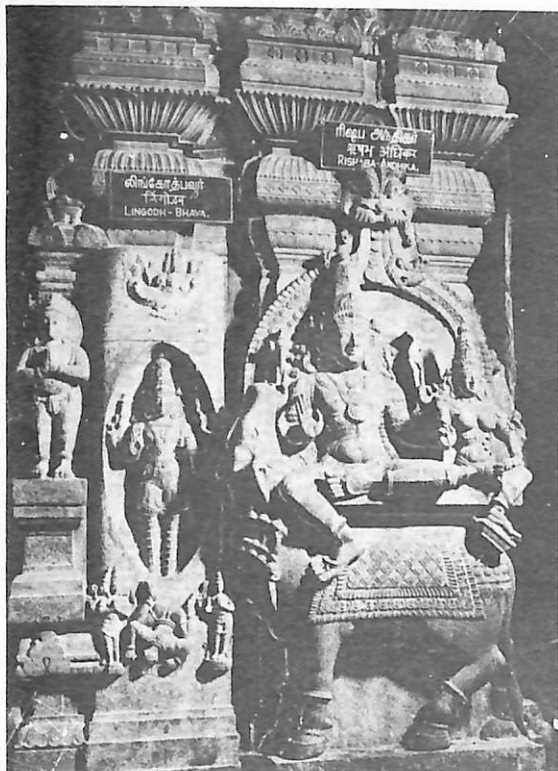
Mukkuruni Vinayakar

From the shrine of Meenakshi we retrace our steps through the Kilikoottu Mandapam. At the northern end, Mukkuruni Vinayakar, facing south, welcomes us. This eight feet high image of Vinayakar was found when Thirumalai Nayakkar was digging the Vandiyoor Theppakulam.

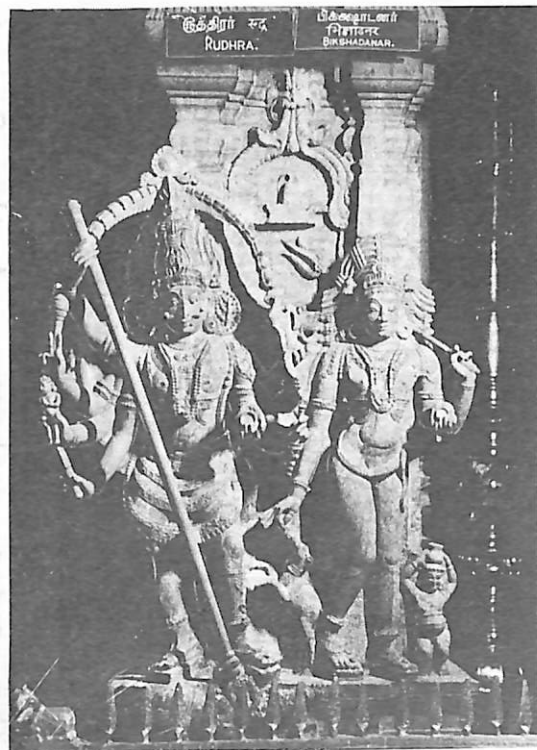
The shrines dedicated to Gnana-sambandar, poets of the Third Tamil Sangam and Natarajar are found in the outer prakaram of the Swami shrine. The famous Kambathadi Mandapam is built just in front of the shrine in this prakaram.

Kambathadi Mandapam

Kambathadi Mandapam contains charming statues which are unparalleled in their exquisite beauty and intricate carvings. The golden flagstaff, nandi and balipeedam are at the centre. Lord Siva in His different manifestation is represented on each of the eight ornamental pillars of the mandapam. There are also many images depicting the avatars of Lord Vishnu. Of all these, the finest work is the one



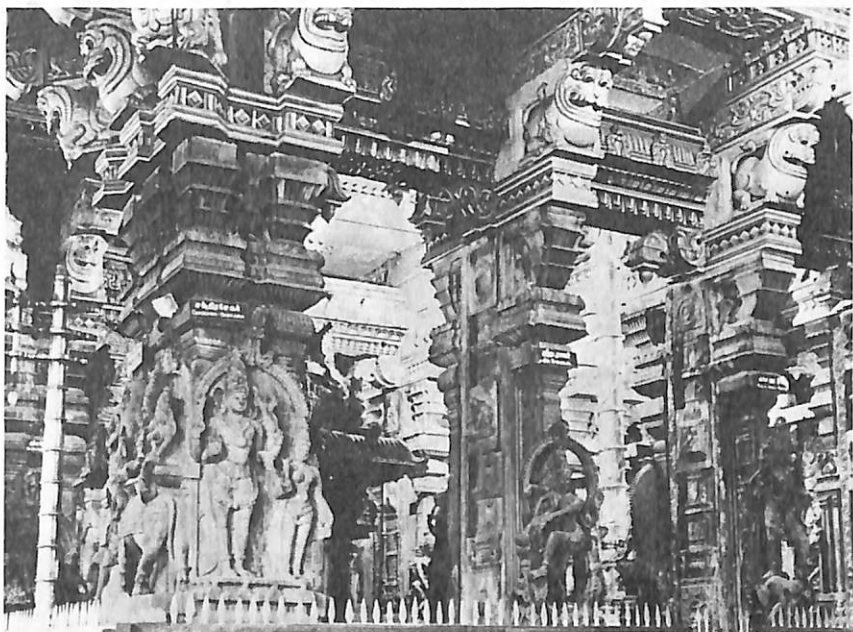
Lingodhpavar - Rishabha Andhigar



Rudrar - Bikshadananar

depicting the wedding of Meenakshi. This is a striking illustration of the excellence of Dravidian Art. The sculptor's ingenuity infusing so much life in the stone is quite astounding. Near the mandapam stand the colossal statues of Agni Veerabadra, Ahora Veerabadra, Kali and Siva in Urdhva Thandava pose. Each of these mammoth statues is a treat to our imagination and this mandapam remains a sculptural museum where we are lost in wonder.

Kambathadi Mandapam



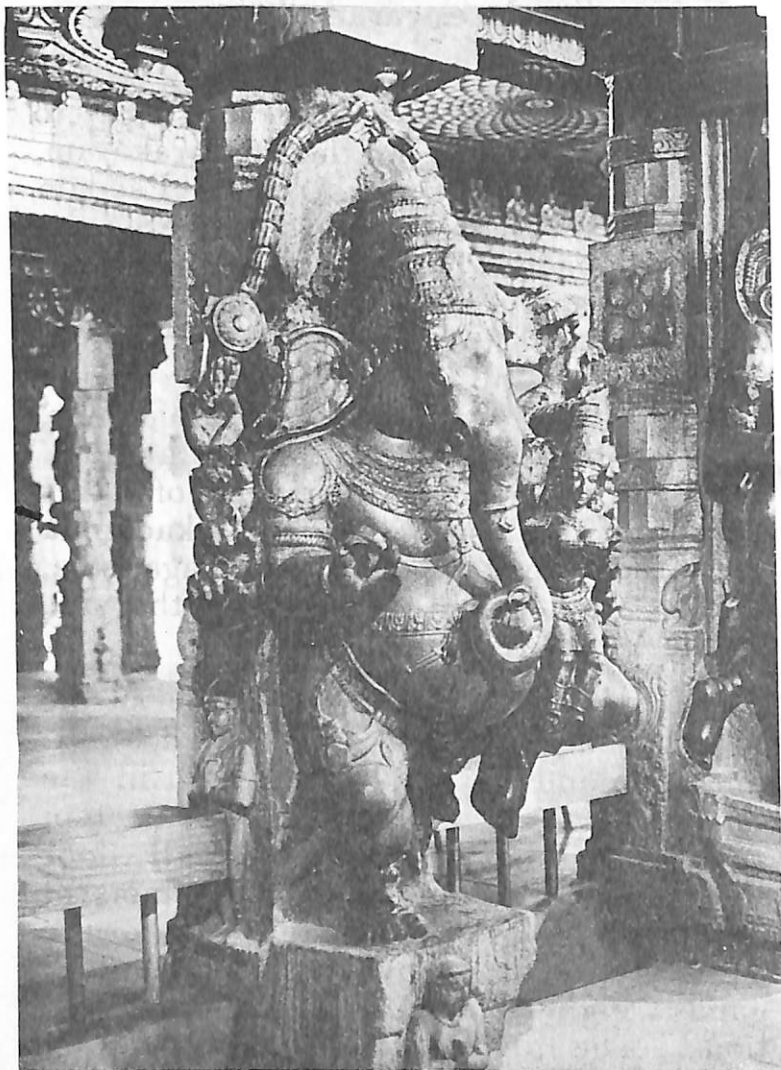


Two dancing poses of Lord Natarajar

Sundareswarar Shrine

Images of Dwarapalakas 12 ft. in height keep watch at the entrance to the Swamy Shrine. In the first prakaram, we can see the Arukal Peedam (pedestal with six pillars) where the Thiruvilayadal Puranam was inaugurated. Two brass-covered Dwarapalakas stand here. There are shrines dedicated to Saraswathi, 63 Nayanmars, Utsava moorthi, Kasi Viswanathar, Bikshadanar, Siddhar and Durgai in this prakaram. On the northern corridor of this prakaram we see the holy kadamba tree, the Kanaka Sabha, the Yaga sala, and a well which is seen by the side of the Vanni tree.

In the next prakaram is the shrine of Lord Natarajar. This is called Velli-ambalam and we worship the Lord in the dancing pose with His right foot raised. Passing through a small door we come to the immediate precincts of Sundareswarar in the sanctum sanctorum. This is supported by sixtyfour boothaganas, eight elephants and thirtytwo lions. The lingam, which bears so many names like Chokkanathar, Karpurachockar inspires a deep devotion.



Dancing Ganapathy
(Hall of Thousand Pillars)

Hall of Thousand Pillars

From the Swami Sannithi we proceed to the Hall of Thousand Pillars, crossing the Kambathadi Mandapam. The equestrian statue of Ariyanatha Mudaliar who built this treasure-house of art, greets us at the entrance. On either side are the statues of Kannappar, Bikshadanar, Chandramathi, Kuravan and Kurathi. As we enter, the Chakram carved on the ceiling, denoting the sixty Tamil years, is astonishing. The 985 pillars in the hall are so arranged that from whichever angle one views, they appear in a straight line. The images of Manmatha,

Hall of Thousand Pillars





Bikshadanar



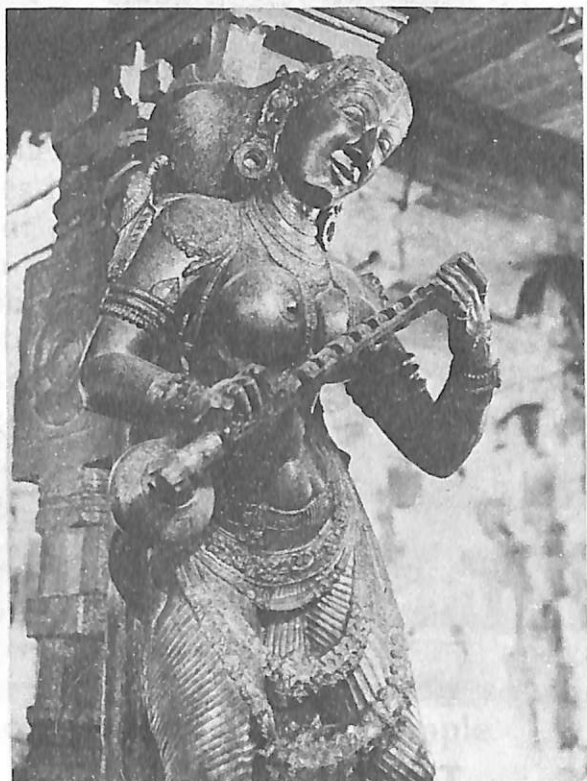
Kurathi

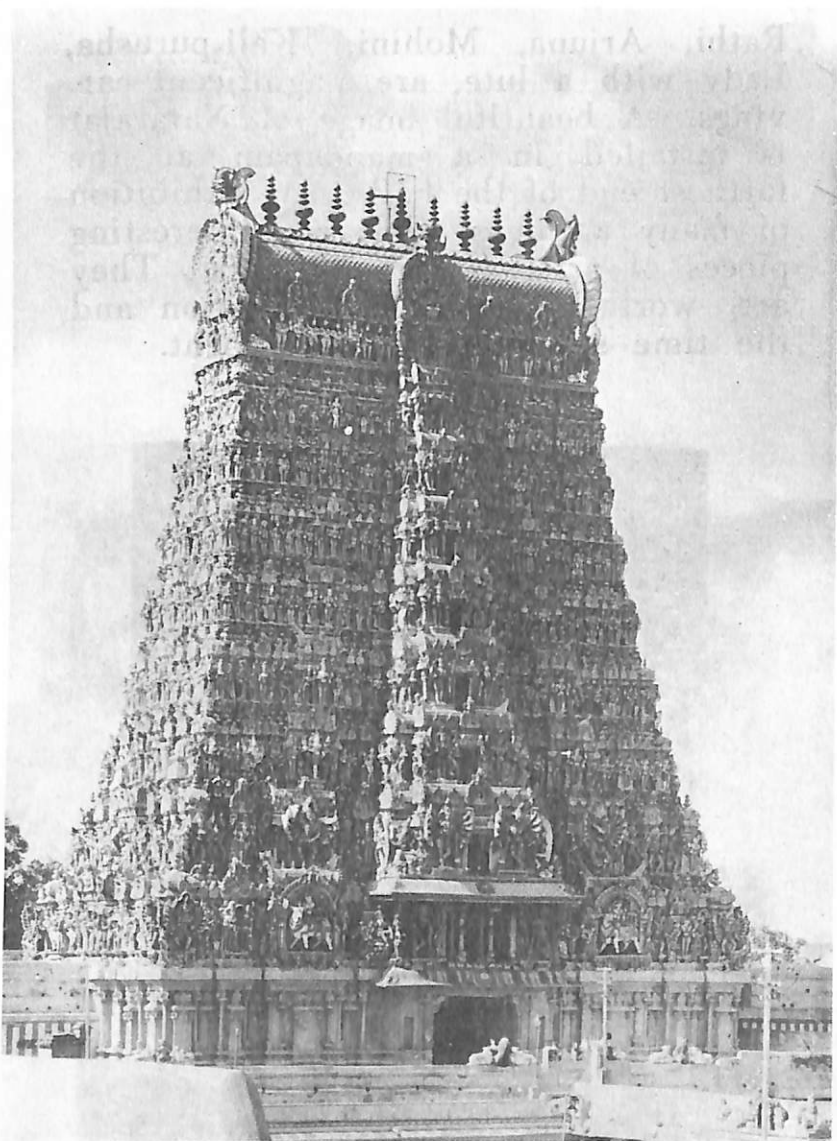


Kuravan

Rathi, Arjuna, Mohini, Kali-purusha, Lady with a lute, are magnificent carvings. A beautiful image of Natarajar is installed in a mandapam at the farthest end of the hall. An exhibition of many antiques, idols and interesting pieces of art is arranged here. They are worthy of one's admiration and the time spent here is well spent.

Lady with a lute





The South Tower

Mangayarkarasi Mandapam

South of the Thousand Pillared Hall is the newly built Mangayarkarasi Mandapam which contains the statues of Koon-Pandiyan, Mangayarkarasi, Gnana-sambandar and a Lingam.

On the southern side is the Servaikar Mandapam constructed by Maruthu Pandyas. Nearby is the Thirukalyana Mandapam, the ceiling of which is an example of the finest piece of wood-work.

Towers

The street surrounding the main shrines is called Adivveethi. It is adorned by four gigantic 9 storeyed towers. The South Tower, 160 feet high, with parabolic curves at the sides, is the tallest. It was constructed by Sevvanthi Chettiar in the 16th century. The North Tower, otherwise known as Mottai Gopuram, is without any striking artistic work. The oldest tower on the eastern side was constructed in the 13th century by Maravarman Sundara Pandyan, and the West Tower was constructed in the 14th century by Parakrama Pandyan. There are also smaller towers which add to the beauty of the temple.



Thadathagai,

Musical Pillars

By the side of the North Tower there are five Musical pillars each consisting of 22 smaller pillars carved out of a single stone, and producing musical tunes when tapped.

Puthu Mandapam

In front of the East Gopuram stands the Puthu Mandapam, otherwise known as Vasantha Mandapam, constructed during the reign of Thirumalai Nayakkar. It is the summer resort of Sundareswarar and Meenakshi. On the granite pedestal at the centre of the hall, the deities are placed during festivals. Wonderful stone images of Thadathagai, Meenakshi's wedding, Ravana lifting Mount Kailas and the stone-elephant eating sugarcane decorate this mandapam. The Nayakkar rulers are immortalised by their statues here.

As we come out of the Puthu Mandapam, the unfinished Raya Gopuram arrests our attention. Considering the plinth area, we feel that, if completed, this tower might have been the biggest in India.

Vandioor Theppakulam

At the outskirts of the city is the finely constructed Vandiyoor Theppakulam also known as Mariamman Theppakulam, measuring 1000 feet long and 950 feet wide. On the island in the middle of the tank there is a beautiful mandapam surrounded by four smaller ones.

The illuminated floating festival on the Thai Poosam day is an unforgettable sight.

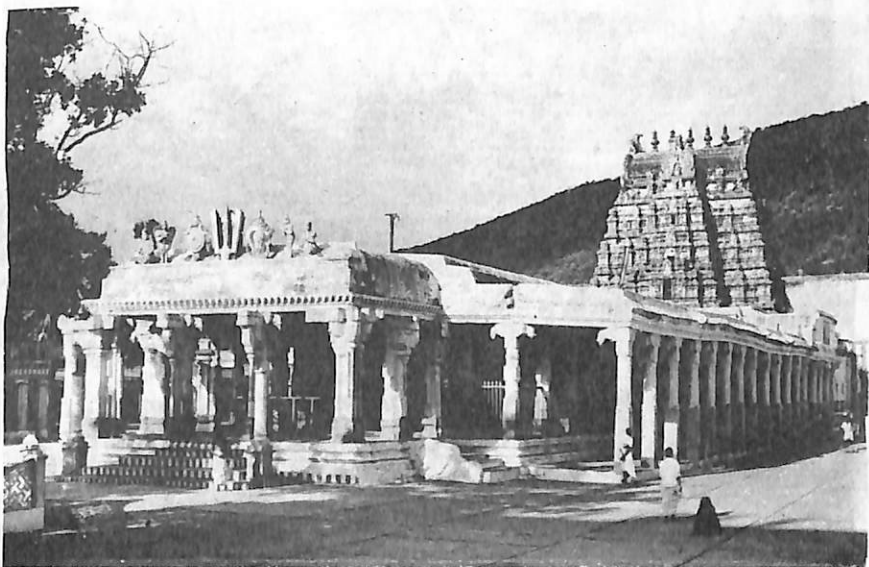
Mariamman Theppakulam



Alagar Koil

19 kilometres east of Madurai, there is a beautiful Vishnu Temple amidst an enchanting mountain. The deity installed here is Sundararajan. For the daily abishekam of the bronze image water from a spring 3 kilometres uphill is used, since any other water blackens the image. On Chithra Poornami day the image of Alagar is taken in a procession to the river Vaigai. This festival is attended by multitude of devotees.

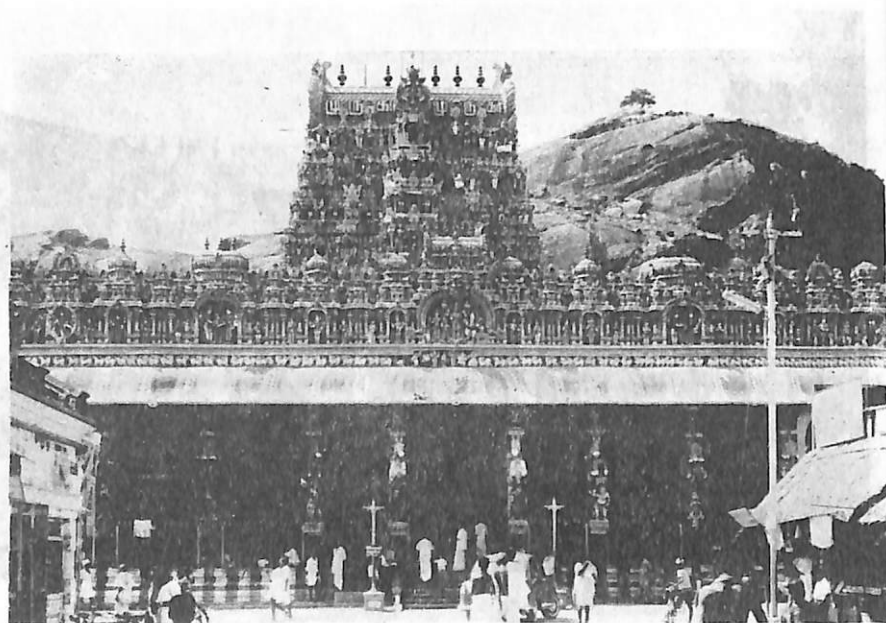
Alagar Koil



Thirupparankuntram

Thirupparankuntram, 10 k. m. south of Madurai, is one of the six famous temples dedicated to Lord Muruga. It is a cave temple. Here Lord Muruga was wedded to Devayanai, daughter of Indra, after annihilating Surapadman. In the temple there are separate shrines dedicated to Siva, Ganapathi, Durgai, Vishnu and other deities. At the entrance to the temple there are 48 pillars with artistic carvings.

Thirupparankuntram





திருப்பரங்குன்றம் முருகன்

SRI MURUGAN (TIRUPPARANKUNTRAM)

Legends Around Madurai

Once Indra, the king of Devas, was burdened with the sin of Brahmahathi. To expiate the sin he did penance at various shrines. While traversing near the Kadamba forest of Madurai, he was suddenly purified. On further search, he found a swayambulingam under a Kadamba tree. He worshipped the deity with golden lotus flowers, built a vimanam over the deity and returned to Devaloka.

Later a merchant by name Dananjayan, who chanced to stay for a night near the shrine, found deva poojas being performed at the shrine and informed King Kulasekara Pandyan who ruled in Manavoor, of this incident. The King came to the forest and worshipped the Lord. It was he who built the proper temple and the city of Madurai that became the famous capital of the Pandyas.

After Kulasekara Pandyan, Malaya-dwaja Pandyan succeeded to the throne. As he had no children, he and his wife Kanchanamala performed a yagna to beget a child. They were astounded and

worried when a three-year-old girl with three breasts appeared from the yagna-kundam. A divine voice consoled them telling that her third breast would disappear when she meets her husband. The child, Thadathagai, was brought up like a prince and she mastered all the arts of war. Thadathagai succeeded the king and conquered the neighbouring countries and reached Kailas itself, the abode of Lord Siva. But on the battle field when her eyes met the gaze of Siva, her third breast disappeared. She realised she had met her Lord.

Lord Siva came to Madurai, married Thadathagai and they ruled Madurai for a time. Then, after, making their son Ugra Pandyan, an incarnation of Muruga, as the King, they assumed the divine forms, as Sundareswarar and Meenakshi.

History of the Temple

The origin of the temple goes back to legendary times. Only a shrine of Siva and the walls surrounding it were existing in the 7th century A.D. The shrine of Meenakshi was built during the reign of Chadayavarman Sundara Pandyan, in the 12th century. The 9-storeyed towers were constructed between

Sri Meenakshi Temple

Timings: 5 a.m. to 1 p.m.
4 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Photography inside the Temple is allowed between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. on payment of a fee of Rupees Five. Please enquire at the office within the Temple for details.

Temple Art Museum

Exhibited, within the precincts of Sri Meenakshi Temple, in the Thousand Pillared Hall. Entrance fee: 50 paise per person. Charges for photography: Rs. Five.

Timings: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Thirumalai Naick Mahal

Timings: 9 a.m. to 12 noon.
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

A "Light & Sound" show is held daily at the Mahal, in English and Tamil.

English: 6.45 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.
Tamil : 8.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Admission by tickets, available at the Mahal.

the 13th and 16th century. The reign of the Nayakka rulers for 200 years saw the construction of many mandapams and other additions like the Hall of Thousand Pillars, Ashta Sakthi Mandapam, Puthu Mandapam, Vandiyoor Theppakulam, Nayakkar Mahal.

The greater part of the Temple, as it exists today, was built between the 12th and 18th century. In 1877 renovation on a large scale was done by the Nagarathar, especially by the Vainagaram family. During this renovation, many of the fine sculptures in the Kambathadi Mandapam were installed and the unfinished North Tower was completed. In 1960-63 a Committee headed by Sri P. T. Rajan undertook a complete renovation of the Temple during which the sudais in all the Towers were repaired and remade, and painted with traditional colours. Faded paintings inside the temple were repainted. Many new images depicting scenes from Thiruvilayadal Puranam were also put up on the walls of the inner parakaram of the Swamy temple. A new mandapam dedicated to Mangayarkarasi was put up with modern materials and technique to commemorate this great renovation.

Festivals

Madurai is a city of festivals. The archakas of the temple take active part in enacting the different Thiruvilayadals of Lord Siva during the festivals. Every month witnesses a festive occasion.

The important festivals are in the months of Chithrai, Avani and Thai. The wedding of Meenakshi on the Chitra Poornami day, and the procession of Alagar to the river Vaigai attract multitudes of people from all parts of the country.

Temple City

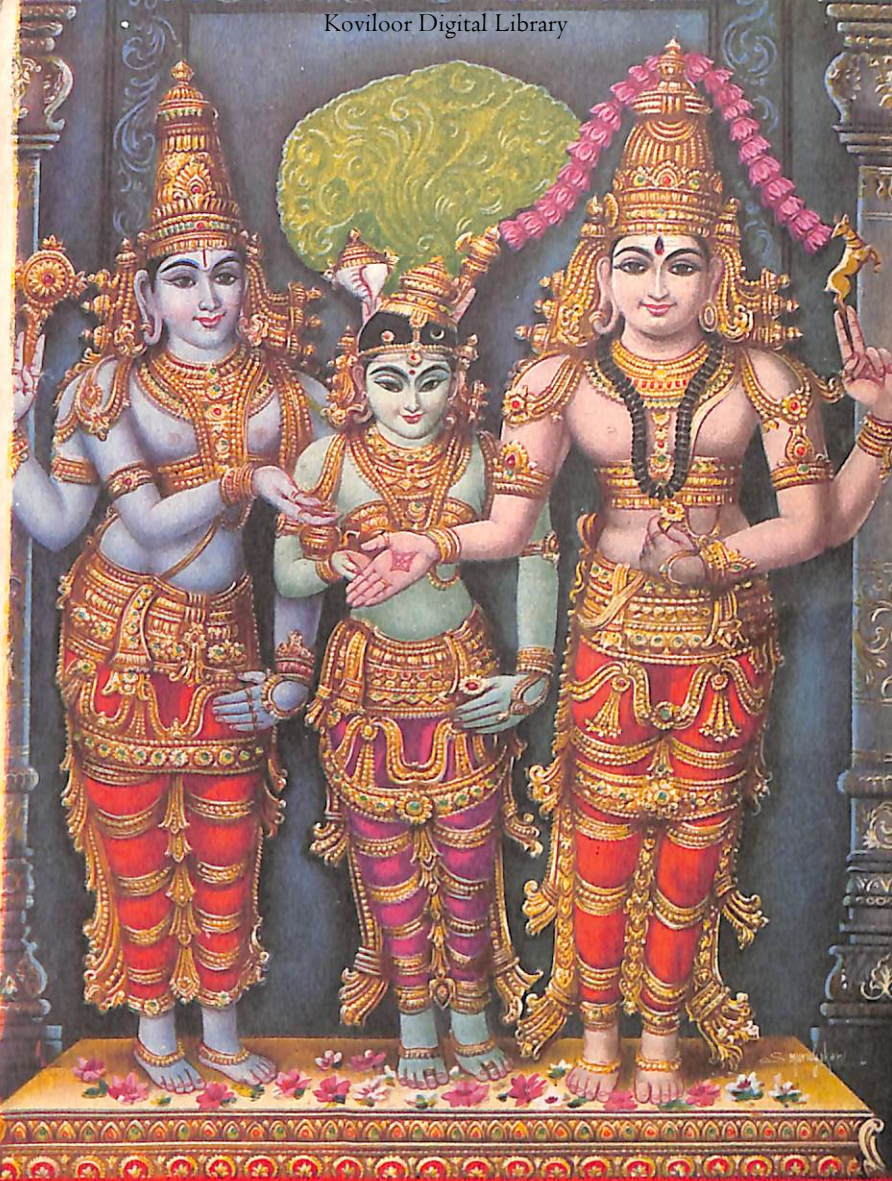
Madurai has become the greatest attraction for every tourist who visits the South. It leaves an indelible impression in their minds and enriches their knowledge of Tamilian art, architecture and culture. They cherish sweet memories of their visit, and the soaring towers will continue to attract the visitors again and again to this Temple City.

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Car Festival Madurai



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